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House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. SOLIS).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,

May 8, 2007.

I hereby appoint the Honorable HILDA L. SOLIS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) for 5 minutes.

INDIA: A DEMOCRACY STRUGGLING FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. STEARNS. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I come to the House floor as a result of a town meeting I had in my congressional district in which I heard from the Harvest Christian Church. It goes to the point that the United States and India, as all of us know, are the world's two largest democracies. However, although the Indian National Government guarantees religious freedom, in many of the provinces, oppression and

persecution still exist. I want to bring that to my colleagues' attention this morning. Harvest Christian Church in my home district has worked closely with many church groups in India. And, as I mentioned, during my last town meeting, Pastor Crowe shared with me some of the disturbing things that are happening there.

On April 1, during Palm Sunday celebrations in Jabalpur, in the middle of their worship service, about 30 people from a Hindu extremist group—whose name literally means “religious army”—came with sticks and started beating everybody, including the evangelist and the men and women and children who were in the congregation that day. The pastor was badly beaten and suffers severe head injury. These people were admitted in the hospital where people from that group went and threatened them. They decided to leave the hospital and are currently staying at undisclosed locations. The attackers remain unpunished for these crimes. In fact, that day no one from the government condemned the attack or sympathized with the victims or the terrorized Christian community, not to speak of offering any relief to the family that were affected by this terrorist group. The police authorities, though reluctant to name the forces behind the attack, announced finally the arrest of five persons. All were from a radical Hindu background and lived in the slums the pastor used to visit regularly. Persecution such as this is not uncommon in India, and these sorts of attacks are not isolated incidents.

My colleagues, in another example, a mob of around 50 Hindu extremists surrounded a house church the night of April 22 and began shouting derogatory statements at all the worshipers in the church. Terrified believers in the church shut the doors, phoned the local police and asked for help. Two policemen arrived and took two pastors to the police station. En route, a few ac-

tivists began beating and insulting the pastors and four other believers who had accompanied them, as the police officers simply looked on. “At the station, the police shouted at the pastors, and the extremists who were present made accusations that the pastors were forcibly converting people and inciting the people to stop doing Hindu rituals and to remove pictures of Hindu deities from their houses,” George said. The tirade continued until 3 a.m., when the pastors were jailed, not being released on bail until April 25. The police inspector stated the pastors were charged with “promoting enmity” between different groups on grounds of religion and “deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings or any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.”

While there is ongoing violence against Christians in India, the good news is that it is endemic and the number of incidents are not increasing. The BJP is a Hindu political party, which was in national power until 2004 when the secular constitution party then came to power. However, they still retain positions of power in some states, and it is there where the majority of attacks against Christians occur.

According to the State Department International Religious Freedom Report 2006, “The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice. However, the government sometimes did not act swiftly enough to counter effectively societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by some leaders of state and local governments to limit religious freedom. Despite government efforts to foster communal harmony, some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities, particularly at the state and local level, as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity.”

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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